



Yukon Employees' Union
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March 31, 2020

The Honourable Pauline Frost
Minister of Health and Social Services
Yukon Legislative Assembly
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon,
Y1A 2C6

Dear Minister Frost,

We write on behalf of our members employed at Nakwaye Ku Daycare regarding Yukon Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and current state of emergency declared last week. The Nakwaye Ku Board of Directors contacted you last week imploring you and the government to reconsider its approach to supporting Yukon daycares and families. We ask that you continue to fund Nakwaye Ku so they can pay their staff.

Our principle concern is the consequences of the Chief Health Officer stating that daycares are an essential service and your department's insistence that daycares must remain open in order to receive their direct operating grants.

While we recognize that some parents continue to rely on daycares for childcare during this time of crisis, the Nakwaye Ku Daycare's situation is unique. Nakwaye Ku is located on Yukon College's main campus and primarily serves families of Yukon College employees and students. In response to the COVID 19 health crisis and per the direction of the federal and territorial government, Yukon College has closed resulting in a significant reduction in enrollment rates at Nakwaye Ku Daycare. In total, the daycare generally provides care to 36-42 children when part-time and full-time numbers are combined. After the initial government calls that workers begin working from home and keep their children home, enrollment rates quickly dropped to 12 children. By the time the daycare officially closed its doors last week there were only 4 children enrolled in care.

We are sure you can appreciate that children three years of age and under have difficulty conceptualizing, let alone practicing, social distancing. Further, the organization simply does not have access to personal protective equipment required to keep staff and children safe. Many of the staff are also vulnerable due to health, age, and other factors. From an operational standpoint, it is simply not viable to continue to pay a staff of eight workers to care for four children. Most importantly, remaining open is not in the best interest of Yukoners and collective public health.

The consequence of depriving not-for-profit organizations like Nakwaye Ku their direct operating grants is that workers will be laid off. We understand the budget was passed in record time and we anticipate that the budget allowed for regular funding, including Nakwaye Ku's regular funding. If this is the case, we insist that the regular funding amount be paid to Nakwaye Ku so they can pay their staff. Childcare workers should not have to suffer as a consequence of COVID 19, especially if the funds are available.

As stated in their letter of March 25, 2020, the Daycare's Board of Directors has confirmed that other jurisdictions, including British Columbia have offered funding packages to childcare centres in response to COVID. Across the country, many daycares and childcare centres have been closed but continue to receive funding from provincial and territorial governments. We are requesting that you take the lead from other jurisdictions and continue to fund Nakwaye Ku so they can pay their staff. For your review, here is a link to childcare responses across the country;

https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/COVID_19_PT_Chart_03_29_2020_MF_SM.pdf .

The Canadian Child Care Federation is also urging governments to continue funding and allow for the closure of daycares whenever possible. You can view their March 25, 2020 letter here;

<https://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/wp-content/uploads/Open-Letter-to-PT-Ministers-March-25-2020.pdf> and access other relevant information on their main webpage at <https://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/> .

We recognize this is a difficult time for Yukoners, for Canadians, and for many people across the globe. We are hopeful and optimistic that the Yukon Government will continue to do whatever it can to help lessen the burden on Yukon workers and Yukon families by continuing to fund Nakwaye Ku during these challenging and uncertain times.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Steve Geick, President
Paul Johnston, Vice President
Tony Thomas, Vice President Communities

Yukon Employees' Union

cc:
Claire Daitch, Nakwaye Ku Daycare
Stacey Hassard, Leader of the Official Opposition
Kate White, Leader of the Third Party